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Probation Officers' Attitudes
Towards Criminal Offenders, the Causes of Crime,
and Treatment Programs

by

Hannelore Watts

A thesis submitted to the Department of Political
Science and Sociology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Criminal Justice.

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July, 1988

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This thesis is dedicated to the probation
officers in Region II. Without their
help and support this study would not have
been possible.

ABSTRACT

This study reports on survey research into Florida Probation Officers' attitudes towards the causes of crime, the criminal offender and rehabilitation and treatment. The views on crime and on the offender are shaped by at least three major theoretical perspectives. First, this paper examines whether probation officers identify more with the classical theories, the biological theories or the sociological theories of criminology. Secondly, the probation officers' attitudes toward offenders are examined. For example, do probation officers express any positive opinions about the population they interact with, or do they feel that all offenders are equally bad? The third part of this research is geared towards the officers' attitudes about rehabilitation and treatment of offenders. Some current literature suggests that the field of probation is presently moving in a more punitive direction and away from the concept of rehabilitation. This research examines if this trend is reflected in probation officers' beliefs. In addition, the study shows how the probation officers in this sample feel about their jobs.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the 1960's, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice observed that "what America does about crime depends ultimately upon how Americans see crime....The lines along which the Nation takes specific action against crime will be those that the public believes to be the necessary ones." (U.S. Department of Justice, 1967, p. 2).

Over the course of the past decade, results of surveys suggest that a movement to "get tough on crime" has emerged across the nation (Cullen, Clark and Wozniak, 1985). Evidence of this swing in the direction of "law and order" can be observed in the renewed establishment of mandatory prison sentences, the return of the death penalty, the abolishment of parole and longer prison sentences. With the rate of prison commitments rising steadily and the rate of

parole decreasing, the nation's state and federal prison population grew by nearly five percent in the first six months of 1987, reaching a record high of 570,519 inmates (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1987). The increase of more than 43,000 inmates in one year is the second largest absolute increase recorded in the 60-year history of the National Prisoner Statistics Program (Bureau of Justice Statistics, May 1987). A Gallup Poll taken in January 1982 showed a majority of people calling for more prisons in their states and stating that they were willing to pay more taxes to build prison facilities (Gallup Report, 1982). By 1986, public support for the death penalty was at the highest point recorded in nearly a half century of scientific polling (Gallup Report, 1986).

However, the widespread belief that murderers should be put to death and that criminals deserve harsh penalties is not agreed upon by all (Cullen, Clark and Wozniak, 1985). There are groups within society who may not agree with the "get tough on crime" movement or the proposed changes. The Survey Research Program at the Sam Houston University Criminal Justice Center conducted two studies in 1980, both of which sampled 2,000 Texas residents

regarding their attitudes towards crime and criminal justice (Cullen, Clark and Wozniak, 1985). They found that there was little reluctance among Texans to punish those that may run afoul of the law. On the other hand, responses also revealed that the treatment of offenders remains a legitimate correctional goal to most Texans. Rehabilitation was rated as the most important function in Community Corrections (Cullen, Clark and Wozniak, 1985). Similarly, a Gallup Poll taken in 1982 reported public support for a wide range of proposals that have been suggested as ways of rehabilitating criminals (Gallup Report, 1982).

The views of the general public on crime and the offender are largely shaped by the media. Few average citizens have direct on-going contact with criminals. However, there are groups such as police officers, correctional officers and probation and parole officers who have daily interaction with offenders. While there have been studies on the attitudes of police officers and correctional officers toward the population with whom they work (McCormick, Huang and Walkey, 1985; State of Alabama, Board of Corrections 1979; Jacobs, 1978; Williams,

1983), little research has been conducted specifically on probation and parole officers' attitudes towards the causes of crime, the criminal offender and treatment of the population with whom they interact. First hand experience with offenders on a daily basis may contribute to a certain insight and understanding of the criminal population. This may cause them to have perspectives, regarding crime, the criminal population and treatment programs that differ from the views of the general public.

Focus and Purpose of the Research

This study was designed to provide information on the attitudes of probation officers towards crime, the criminal offender and treatment of offenders. The first question this paper examines is whether probation officers as a group identify with any one of the major theories on crime and the criminal offender more than others. For example, do probation officers predominantly believe in the classical school of criminological thought which indicates that crime is committed by choice for the offender's personal gain and pleasure, or do they believe in the biological perspective in the positive school of

criminological thought, advocating that crime is the result of an offender's uncontrollable urges and behavior? Or, as a third alternative, do probation officers as a class adhere to sociological positivism, believing that society contributes to a person's criminal involvement through its social and economic conditions, social disorganization or conflict?

The second question addressed in this study is about probation officers' attitudes toward offenders. Do probation officers think that criminals are basically bad or deceitful and should never be trusted? Or do they feel that offenders can be trusted, or at least granted the benefit of doubt?

Third, this study examines probation officers' attitudes towards rehabilitation and community resources. Do probation officers believe that offenders are capable of change and that society is too harsh with them, or do they think treatment and rehabilitation are a waste of time and effort and that society is too lenient and offenders are coddled?

In summary, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of probation officers in Florida toward the causes of crime?
2. What are the attitudes of probation officers in Florida toward the criminal population they supervise?
3. What are the attitudes of probation officers in Florida toward the treatment of offenders?

Other information this researcher sought to obtain during the study were the respondent's age, sex, race, length of employment as a probation officer, and college major. The purpose of capturing this latter data was to determine if there is any relationship between these demographic variables and probation officers' attitudes towards crime, the criminal offender and treatment. In addition, officers' job satisfaction was also assessed.

Expectations Regarding the Findings
of this Study

It was anticipated that this study would find a high percentage of agreement among probation officers concerning the causes of crime. Probation officers were expected to tend to blame the offender for his/her criminal involvement, believing that each freely chooses to commit a criminal act. This view omits most of the biological theory that emphasizes the innateness of criminal behavior. It was expected that most probation officers involved in this study would believe that a person was not born to be an offender but commits crime because of various other factors.

When measuring the attitudes of probation officers towards the offenders they deal with, it was predicted that this study would identify some probation officers as being primarily concerned with the offender, on one hand, and some as primarily concerned with protecting the community, on the other. It was expected that the younger and less experienced officers would have a more positive outlook and would view themselves as facilitators of

change in the offender and, therefore, be more concerned with the needs of the offender. It was anticipated that these officers would be identified as adamant in their ideals, as they have not yet been disillusioned by the reality of criminal habits.

On the other hand, it was expected that those officers who have been in their positions five years or longer would be more law enforcement-oriented, holding the protection of the community as paramount. Due to their many years of job experience, these officers have seen more offenders become recidivists rather than achieving the goals of rehabilitation. For these reasons more experienced officers were expected to express great doubt as to the effectiveness of treatment and community resources. By comparison, the younger officers were expected to be more hopeful and in favor of utilizing community-based treatment.

The role of probation officers and the nature of supervision has started to undergo a transformation in the United States. These changes have been reflected nationally in the areas directly related to the probation officers' law enforcement functions. In some states, such as California, for example,

probation officers are now deputized and carry handguns. It is presumed that the present trend toward stricter punishment in corrections reflect our widespread present societal preference for harsher discipline and longer prison sentences for offenders. It was expected that a majority of probation officers in this study would be in agreement with this trend. Overall, Probation and Parole is becoming more punishment-oriented and this change is expected to be reflected in this study.

Summary

Society's attitude towards crime and the criminal offender continuously changes. The methods with which society deals with offenders depends largely upon its attitude towards crime and the criminal at any given time. Presently, we appear to be observing a swing in the direction of the "law and order" end of the spectrum. However, not all agree with the national mood to get tough on crime or with proposed changes to do so.

Whereas few average citizens have direct contact with criminals, there are groups of persons who have daily interaction with offenders. Studies have been

conducted on the attitudes of police officers and correctional officers toward the population with which they work. Probation officers' attitudes towards crime and the criminal have been largely neglected in published literature about crime.

This study is designed to concentrate on probation officers' attitudes towards the causes of crime, the criminal population with which they interact and the treatment of offenders.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Accounting for crime and the criminal are age-old problems known to every civilization and every period of history. Explanations of crime currently popular can be linked to those more commonly accepted in the past. Therefore, in order to understand present perspectives and attitudes toward crime, it becomes necessary to review some of the previous beliefs about crime.

Various theorists at different times have offered numerous explanations for crime. Some have attributed it to demons which enter people and express their perverted forces through them, others to inherited biological forces which determine the person's behavior, and still others to such things as the personal will of the criminal, mental illness, the person's conditioning, one's family, the economy, unconscious impulses, a "sick" society which frustrates the aspirations of some, the weather, the climate, the stage of the moon..... (Lillyquist, 1976, p. 12).

As Lillyquist suggests, the readings in the literature on the causes of crime are numerous and

varied. For the purposes of this paper I will concentrate on three major theoretical perspectives: Free Will Theory, Biological Theory and Social Theory. These theories were chosen because they have resulted in great changes in the legal system in early times and still influence present thoughts on crime issues.

Classical Theories Of Criminology

During the mid-1700's, society was at the height of belief in the idea that man could reason, that he possessed free will and that he was able to choose between right and wrong. Human will was accepted as a psychological reality, a faculty or trait of the individual that regulated and controlled behavior. In general, the will was viewed as free, that is, there were no limitations to the choices an individual could make. The idea was accepted that the principal instrument for control of behavior was fear, especially fear of pain. Punishment was a principal method of operating. To create fear was necessary to influence the will and thus control behavior (Vold, 1979).

It was during this period that Italian mathematician Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) published his Essay On Crime and Punishment (1767), in which he held that humans possess free will and make deliberate decisions to behave based upon a calculation of the pain and the pleasure involved. He believed that in every act, man exercised a choice of alternatives and if he selected criminal behavior it was because he anticipated more pleasure and less pain from that choice.

Beccaria advocated a reform of the criminal penal system of his day and he accepted literally the idea that punishment should fit the crime. He believed that there should be an exact scale of punishments for a range of acts from most severe to least severe, without reference to the individual involved or the special circumstances in which the crime was committed. He felt that existing laws actually encouraged crime because they did not take into consideration peoples' abilities to make rational decisions.

Beccaria espoused many other ideas as well. He said, for example, that prevention of crime is more important than punishment for crimes already

committed; that torture and secret accusations should be abolished; that trials should be speedy; that in punishment, not severity but certainty will have the greatest preventive effect; that capital punishment should be abolished; and that the use of imprisonment as a punishment should be greatly extended and the prisons improved by offering better physical care (Vold, 1979). In summary, the classical school as articulated by Beccaria focused on the offense rather than the offender and suggested equal punishment for equal crimes, developing the motto, "Let the punishment fit the crime." It held that man was hedonistic and had sufficient free will so that he could choose between good and evil when he knew what the consequences might be.

Biological Positivism

The end of the dominance of free-will thinking came around 1860, when a change in criminological perspective gave rise to a new view on crime and the offender. Charles Darwin's study of evolution added a final spur to a break with the thoughts of the past. In his Descent of Man (1871), Darwin argued that man was the same general kind of creature as the

rest of the animals, except that he was more highly evolved and developed. Building on the working of Darwin, Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) subsequently became prominent with his proposal that the criminal was a biological throwback to an earlier evolutionary stage, a man more primitive and savage than his non-criminal counterpart (Vold, 1979).

Lombroso's general theory was one of "degeneracy", wherein the physical characters of "stigmata" were the indications of inadequacy and degeneracy (Vold, 1979). Lombroso emphasized the need for direct study of the individual, and began with the basic assumption of the biological nature of human character and behavior (Fox, 1976). Many theories on crime which subsequently developed during the 19th century centered around characteristics of the individual offenders. Early positivistic criminologists studied the physical appearance of criminals in an attempt to identify these characteristics. "The focus was upon the criminal actor rather than the criminal act" (Fox, 1976, p. 19). Answers to the old question, "what sort of creature is man?" began to be given in terms of objective science. The logic and the basic

methodology of objective, empirical, and experimental science became well established during this century (Fox, 1976).

Unlike classical theories, biological or genetic theories of crime adhere to the view that man is not completely free to make choices based on his intelligence, but rather that his behavior is largely determined by forces beyond his control (Vold, 1979).

...Man is not a self-determining agent free to do as he wishes and as his intelligence directs but a creature so limited in his behavior that it is more accurate to say that his intelligence can operate only to find it desirable that he behave as his basic biological organism has already determined that he is to behave....Man has changed and developed not primarily because of his intelligence, but through a slow process of biological adaption known as evolution....Individual human characteristics and behavior are therefore to be understood as reflections of this common organic and biological heritage, not free and intelligently self-determined, but biologically determined (Vold, 1979, p. 10).

However, as society moved into the 20th century and Charles Goring published "The English Convict" (1913), refuting Lombroso's claim of the "born criminal" and biological theory, the attention of criminologists shifted to social and psychological factors (Fox, 1976).

Sociological Positivism

During the first part of the twentieth century the majority of research in crime was conducted by sociologists (Fox, 1976). Since that time the search for causes of crime has tended to focus on social and emotional factors. Case studies of offenders have been used to understand criminal behavior. Also popular have been studies of delinquent gangs, criminal careers and comparisons of delinquents with nondelinquents. In 1939, Edwin H. Sutherland proposed the theory of differential association, which is generally considered to be the first purely sociological theory of crime that centered attention on social interaction rather than the traits of the individual (Vold, 1979). This theory is based on social disorganization and a learning of criminal behavior from the association of individuals with criminal patterns. Also, the concept of anomie received major attention during the 20th century when Emil Durkheim translated the term as "the loss of individual identification with one's cultural group" (Fox, 1976, p.26). Robert K. Merton further elaborated that "because criminal behavior grows out of a contradiction between the cultural and the

social structure and, in addition, between the cultural values and the means provided for achieving them, the individual dissociated from his cultural group may well exhibit deviant behavior" (Fox, 1976, p. 32). Results of the research conducted during the 20th century include findings that criminal behavior is learned from association and that crime is the result of cultural conflict and alienation (Fox, 1976). During the 1960's some scholars also attempted to find relationships between crime and poverty, unemployment and a variety of other economic factors. Many researchers viewed poor economic conditions as providing an undernourished environment in which goodness had difficulty thriving.

The theoretical schools reviewed above are only three out of many of the theoretical perspectives on crime which marked the development of criminology up to the present. The early perspectives emphasized crime as individual behavior and sought explanations in characteristics of individual offenders. As sociological interest in crime grew, the search for causes led to investigation of the social environment. As the search for the causes of crime continues today, we have to admit that we have not

yet reached the point where we can hold any single theory to be the explanation of crime.

CHAPTER III: ATTITUDES TOWARDS CRIME AND CRIMINALS:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In support of the present study, a computer search was conducted in order to locate prior research dealing with the attitudes of probation officers toward crime issues. No previous work relating specifically to probation officers' attitudes about crime was found. However, many studies concerning probation officers in general were available. Also, one article on police officers' attitudes toward offenders and several studies on correction officers' attitudes toward inmates were discovered. After reviewing all potentially related articles, most were discarded because they were not relevant to this study. Altogether, sixteen previous studies were found to be worthy of detailed review.

Public Attitude Regarding Crime Issues

In 1965 the Gallup Poll reported that for the first time crime was viewed by Americans as the most important problem facing the nation. In 1968 the Harris Poll found 81 percent of the people believing that law and order had broken down. In Support For Leniency In The Criminal Courts, Nock and Sheley (1979) reported the results of an analysis of public attitudes regarding a leniency in the court's treatment of offenders. Results for the years 1972-1977 indicate that the public desire for harsher treatment of criminals increased steadily from 61 percent in 1972 to a high of 95 percent in 1977. During the same time period only 3.9 percent of the public desired greater leniency in court sentences. Also, in 1986 public support for the death penalty was the highest point recorded in nearly a half century of scientific polling. According to the Gallup Report of February 1986, seven out of ten adult Americans favored execution of persons convicted of murder (Gallup Report, 1986). The highest level of support was reported in November

1987 when 75 percent said they favored the death penalty for murder (Gallup Report, 1986).

In an attempt to provide an explanation of the recent changes in the level of punitiveness, Stinchcombe, et al. (1980) stated that the United States becomes more punitive as it becomes more afraid of crime. On the other hand, some researchers feel that even though "the American public has displayed a heightened anxiety about crime, increases in fear seem a good deal less dramatic than we have been led to believe" (Scheingold, 1974, p. 8). Based on statewide polls of Texas for the years 1977-1981, Cullen, Clark and Wozniak (1985) investigated attitudes of Texas residents on crime issues. They found that most "Texans think about crime and exercise reasonable care in avoiding uncertain situations. However, there is little firm evidence that the respondents are obsessed with crime and paralyzed by fear" (Cullen and Wozniak, 1985, p. 2). As to punishment of offenders, Scheingold (1984) has indicated that "while there is an unmistakable punitive side of the public's policy preferences, an undercurrent of moderation is also apparent" (p. 35).

The Texas study concluded that even though most Texans feel that the courts are too soft on crime, Texans are not without their humanitarian side. Rehabilitation was rated in the survey as the most important function of community corrections. While Texans believed that more prisons should be built, they were equally in favor of simultaneously developing community corrections programs. According to the poll, there is "clear sentiment that non-violent offenders are prime candidates for community supervision, and a substantial group believes that placement in programs should be individualized and not rigidly matched to the nature of crime... As seen in the attitudes expressed by Texans, a group hardly known for their liberalism, the public is neither gripped by fear nor unwilling to consider a range of correctional responses to the criminally wayward" (Cullen, Clark and Wozniak, 1985, p. 5).

This view of public attitudes is supported by a Gallup Poll from January 1982. The survey revealed that the public believed by a two to one margin that it was more important to get prisoners started "on the right road" than it was to punish them for their crime. The public, in fact, overwhelmingly supported

a wide range of proposals that have been suggested as ways of rehabilitating criminals. For example, 94 percent of the survey respondents thought prisoners should learn a trade to fit them for a job prior to release; 89 percent thought prisoners should be paid for their work and return some of the money to the victim. It is interesting to note that even among persons who felt it was more important to punish criminals, large majorities also favored the proposal for rehabilitation tested in this survey (Cullen, Clark and Wozniak, 1985).

In summary, the attitudes of the general public about crime and the offender in these studies seemed to be contradictory. On one hand there was a desire for harsher penalties, and on the other hand, rehabilitation was believed to be an important function of community corrections. The general public does not have first hand daily experience regarding crime issues or with the criminal offender. However, there are groups within society, such as police officers, correctional officers and probation officers, which deal with crime and interact with offenders on a daily basis. Therefore, their views

about crime and the criminal population may be different from the views of the general public.

Attitudes of Criminal Justice Employees

Regarding Crime and the Offender

A study was conducted by McCormick, Huang and Walkey (1985) examining the attitudes of police officers toward offenders and comparing them with the attitudes of college students. Both the student and police groups were found to hold negative stereotypes of criminals. However, the students reported the most salient negative characteristic of criminals as "dangerous" followed by "unpredictable," "insincere," "worthless," "cold" and "dirty." For the police officer, the most salient characteristic was "worthless," followed by "dangerous," "cold," "insincere" and "foolish." The authors gave the following interpretation to the study results: "Since students, like the rest of the community, see themselves as victims of increasing criminal activity and, in particular, criminal violence, they regard criminals primarily as dangerous. On the other hand, the police officer whose contact with criminals is based on both greater power and moral superiority,

sees them as primarily worthless, with those who are in jail regarded as foolish as well" (McCormick, Huang and Walker, 1985, p. 56). The study concluded that police and students hold generally similar negative attitudes towards offenders.

A study of the attitudes and opinions of correctional workers concerning their job was conducted by the State of Alabama's Board of Corrections in 1979. It was concluded that 47 percent of the correctional officers felt that inmates do not commit crimes because of poverty, broken homes, or heredity factors, but rather that crimes are committed due to the offenders' free choices. Ninety percent felt that inmates try to take advantage of officers whenever they can. The majority indicated that inmates lack morals and 79 percent feel that strictness is more important in helping inmates than understanding.

A more extensive study of the attitudes of Illinois prison guards concerning crime and the offender was conducted between July 1974 and October 1975 by James B. Jacobs. His research concluded that "the Illinois guards favor deterministic-sociological and psychological explanations of crime causation.

In response to the question, 'Why do inmates commit crimes?' the respondents adopted a multicausal theory of criminality, giving some support to all the social theories of criminality and rejecting decisively only the theory that people are born to be criminal" (Jacobs, 1978, p. 8).

The Illinois data also found that 75 percent of the guards agreed with the statement that "only a few inmates are troublemakers; most of them are decent people" (Jacobs, 1978, p. 193). This is not to say that the guards necessarily accept the inmates or feel comfortable with them. Eighty six percent believed that "prisoners try to take advantage of you whenever they can" (Jacobs, 1978, p. 91).

The Illinois prison guard survey data presented by Jacobs does not support stereotypical depictions of the guard as a stern, even brutal, disciplinarian. Only 26 percent of the guards believed that punishment "is the main reason for putting the offender in prison, where 46 percent of the guards considered 'rehabilitation' the purpose of imprisonment. Six out of ten officers disagreed with the statement that rehabilitation programs are not a waste of time and money" (Jacobs, 1976, p. 192).

In his research regarding the attitudes of prison officers toward offenders, Trevor A. Williams supports the hypothesis that "the greater the extent to which prison officers see their primary task as maintaining order and security within the prison, the greater will be their reliance on disciplinary authority, the more likely they are to hold negative beliefs about inmates" (Williams, 1983, p. 46). His study further suggests that officers' attitudes toward prisoners include beliefs that inmates would behave vindictively toward uniformed staff if the opportunity arose, and that they are morally inferior to other members of society (Williams, 1983). Williams feels that as officers experience tension and conflict in their relations with prisoners, stereotyped beliefs may provide psychological justifications and defenses that are necessary for them to cope with their roles and role pressures.

In his conclusion Williams stated that research regarding many different kinds of organizations has given rise to the concept of "occupational orientation" based on evidence that attitudes are significantly related to the nature of the work which people perform. In his study he found that a

majority of correctional officers demonstrated a similar attitude toward offenders that supported the "occupational orientation" hypothesis.

As previously stated, research specifically on probation officers' attitudes towards crime and the criminal could not be located. However, several different styles among probation officers have been identified in the literature.

Probation Officers' Styles

Probation officers are faced with the dual task of protecting the community on one hand, and serving the needs of the offenders on the other. The method in which this is accomplished largely depends on the officers' beliefs and theories about criminal behavior. Probation officers bring a wide variety of outlooks, philosophies, and attitudes to their jobs. Some individual officers view themselves as law enforcement agents entrusted with protecting society's interests, while others approach their positions from a social work perspective and concentrate on the needs of their clients.

Previous research has been conducted regarding probation officers' attitudes toward treatment and

their attitudes toward punishment. In 1976, Ohlin, Piven and Pappenfort interviewed all probation officers in one state and formulated a distinction among three types of probation officers. The first type of probation officer is the "punitive officer" who is the guardian of middle-class morality. He/she attempts to coerce the offender into conforming by means of threats and punishment. The main emphasis is on control. The second type of probation officer is the "protective agent". He/she shifts back and forth between protecting the offender and protecting the community. Tools used are direct assistance, lecturing, praise and blame. The "welfare worker" is the third type of officer identified. He/she has as his/her ultimate goal the improved welfare of the offender. He/she feels that the only guarantee of community protection lies in the offender's personal adjustment, since external conformity will be only temporary and, in the long run, may make a successful adjustment more difficult (Ohlin, Piven and Pappenfort, 1956). It was expected that this present thesis research would identify both probation officers who adhered to the social work position and

probation officers who were more in agreement with the law enforcement attitude.

It should be noted that whatever a probation officer's orientation may be concerning the supervision of offenders in Florida, officers are bound to a great extent by the rules and regulations of the Department of Corrections. The plan a probation officer develops for an offender's probation period must be approved by a supervisor, and is subject to adjustment through periodic case review procedures. In other words, administrators set policy and probation officers follow.

In summary, the literature regarding criminal justice employees identifies both positive and negative attitudes about crime and the offenders. Police officers tend to demonstrate more negative opinions toward offenders while many correctional officers and probation officers show both positive and some negative feelings for the population they interact with. Even though probation officers are bound by the rules and regulations of the Department of Corrections, it was anticipated that they would adopt individual styles when supervising offenders. As indicated, it was expected that the present

research would identify probation officers who were more treatment-oriented and probation officers who were more punishment-oriented.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to measure Florida probation officers' attitudes towards crime, the criminal offender and treatment.

In Florida there are 1,488 probation officer positions, with an average vacancy of 5.2 percent. These positions are divided into five regions, and each region has four circuits. The location for this study was Region II which has 199 probation officer positions. Region II encompasses 20 northeastern counties extending from Madison in the west to the Georgia line in the north, through Daytona in the south and the Atlantic Ocean on the eastern boundary. The reason for selecting this location was primarily related to accessibility of participants since the researcher is employed as a probation and parole officer in Region II. The data gathering instrument in this study was a questionnaire (Appendix I).

Selection of Items

A literature search was conducted in order to identify items that had been successfully used in the past in other types of attitude studies. The ATP (Attitudes Toward Prisoners) Scale designed by Melvin, Grambling and Gardner (1977) was found to be the most relevant to this study. The preferable quality of this scale is that it was designed to measure attitudes toward prisoners, and many of the items listed in the ATP Scale could be used in this study with minimal change. Many other attitude scales located in this search dealt with unrelated topics and a great deal of alteration would have been necessary in order to fit them to this research.

The initial item pool was composed of 64 items constructed through (a) input by a panel of 10 probation officers and (b) a modification of items used in the ATP Scale. For example, items composed through input by probation officers were obtained as follows: The research was briefly explained to the probation officers and they were asked for evaluative statements concerning crime, the offender, community resources, treatment and services they provided for offenders. Their feelings on these topics were

explored and several questions used in the questionnaire were constructed from their answers. Items used from the ATP Scale were modified by deleting the term "prisoner" and replacing it by the term "offender."

Because the research was exploratory in nature, the researcher decided to provide a range of response choices for each item, based on the assumption that it would be advantageous to assess the intensity of the attitude expressed. Therefore, items were placed in a Likert format in which each item was given five response alternatives (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, undecided). Each opinion item received a score from one to five, with one representing the choice of the alternative reflecting the most positive attitude and five the most negative attitude.

A pre-test was constructed and administered to nine probation officers in order to field test the instrument. After carefully screening the results of the pre-test, several items were deleted and some were modified. Some questions were deleted because they were redundant, irrelevant to the research or confusing to the respondents. Others were too long

and had to be modified or separated into two questions. A revised questionnaire of 56 items was analyzed. The pre-test did not attempt to identify any correlations between attitudes and demographic variables because of the extremely small sample of nine officers.

Since the Florida Department of Corrections does not allow any research within the Department without prior approval of the research project, following the pre-test, a copy of the proposal and the questionnaire were forwarded to the Regional Administrator of Region II in Gainesville and to the Department of Correction's Planning and Research Department in Tallahassee. The first draft of this research project was rejected by both administrations, primarily because some of the questionnaire options relating to the services probation officers provide to offenders contained the possibility of an answer being contrary to Department policy. The Department of Corrections has developed rules and regulations a probation officer must follow when supervising offenders, and these rules were created for the protection of the officer and the Department in terms of financial liability. For

example, officers are prohibited from transporting offenders in their personal cars or giving them money. Some questions of the original questionnaire related to nonconventional practices and were, therefore, not acceptable to the administration.

As a result, all items relating to the services probation officers may or may not provide to offenders were taken out and the study was revised to concentrate only on the probation officers' attitudes towards crime, the offender and treatment. A revised questionnaire was constructed which was divided into four parts. Part one contained questions relating to probation officers' attitudes toward offenders. Part two related to the causes of crime and the third part dealt with the treatment of offenders. Demographic data about the probation officer and items relating to job satisfaction were included in part four of the questionnaire. Even though a part of the original research plan was eliminated, the researcher feels that the core of the study was left unchanged. The revised proposal was forwarded to both agencies for approval. Official permission to begin the field study was received within two weeks.

Method of Administering
the Questionnaire

During the fall of 1987, a list of all probation officers in Region II and their office locations was obtained from the personnel office. Two hundred questionnaires were then divided into four stacks (one for each Circuit in Region II) and placed into four manila envelopes. Accompanying each package was a letter from this researcher to each Circuit Administrator briefly explaining the reason for the study and, in detail, explaining the method in which the questionnaire should be administered, collected and returned.

To ensure a maximum response percentage, a separate memo requested by this researcher was mailed to all Circuit Administrators by the Regional Administrator, indicating that this study was being conducted with the approval of the Department of Corrections and asking for full cooperation. After the questionnaires were received by each Circuit Administrator, they were to be distributed to each unit supervisor with the researcher's instruction letter and Regional Administrator's memo attached.

According to these instructions, the supervisor personally handed the questionnaires to the probation officers during a staff meeting in October of 1987. The officers were given three days to return the questionnaires to the supervisor. After this deadline the questionnaires were returned to the Circuit Administrator who then mailed the returns to the researcher's home in the self-addressed and stamped envelope provided. Of the 200 questionnaires distributed 170 were returned. This is a response rate of 85 percent. However, only 168 could be used for analysis, since two of the questionnaires had to be eliminated because some of the questions were not answered.

The sample population consisted of 81.9 percent white and 18.1 percent black officers. Female representation was 41 percent, while 59 percent were males. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years old, 30 percent were under 31, and 18 percent were over 40 years of age. The most frequent length of employment fell between one and six years, with 33.7 percent working less than three years and 25.3 percent employed between four and six years. Fifteen percent have been probation

officers for less than one year. Most probation officers in this study (43.4%) received their college degree in criminology, while 16.9 percent received degrees in sociology and 15.1 percent in psychology. Surprisingly, 24.7 percent of the sample received a degree in a field not related to the social sciences at all.

Statistics Used For Analyzing the Data

The data was coded by assigning numerical scores to each response category. The numerical scores of each question of every questionnaire were entered into the IBM 4341, Mainframe Computer at the University of North Florida. A frequency table for each question was obtained.

Because the data was considered categorical level only, a test of independence using Chi Square was utilized in order to test for significance. All questions of parts one, two and three of the questionnaire relating to probation officers' attitudes towards crime, the offender and rehabilitation, were correlated to the demographic factors in part four of the questionnaire. Chi

Square tests were considered significant if the p-value was less than or equal to .05.

After the initial analysis of the data, the response categories "strongly agree" and "agree" were combined to form one category labelled "agree". Similarly, the categories "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were combined to form one category labelled "disagree". This was done in order to reduce the data to make it more manageable and easier to examine. A new set of frequency tables was obtained indicating the percentage of all responses to each question.

CHAPTER VI: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Probation Officers' Attitudes

Toward the Criminal Offender

The first portion of the questionnaire containing eleven questions was designed to measure the attitudes of probation officers toward the criminal offender.

It was found that most of the officers expressed a positive outlook concerning offenders. As shown in Table I, a total of 59.5 percent of the officers felt that offenders are capable of change and 71.2 percent felt that offenders deserved to be helped. A close split (51.8%) believed that offenders want to better themselves. This would indicate that these probation officers believed in the importance of their jobs in assisting offenders to become law-abiding and productive members of society. They did not feel that their work was fruitless and a waste of time.

TABLE 1: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward
Offenders, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
1. Offenders never change	63 (37.5%)	100 (59.5%)	5 (3.0%)	168 (100%)
5. Offenders deserve help	120 (71.2%)	39 (23.2%)	9 (5.4%)	168 (99.8%) ^a
8. Offenders want to better themselves	87 (51.8%)	67 (39.9%)	14 (8.3%)	168 (100%)

a. Some error due to rounding

Our society is by nature a forgiving and helping society based on equality for all. This is reflected by the high percentage of officers who felt that offenders deserve to be helped. However, when asked if offenders set long term goals, most officers (91.7%) disagreed, as shown in Table 2. Also, as indicated in Table 2, 51.8 percent of the sample felt that criminals can't be trusted. This would suggest that, even though officers believe that offenders want to change, they realize the difficulty of this task. Many offenders live on a day-to-day basis, have different values and moral standards from non-

TABLE 2: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward
Offenders, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
4. Offenders can't be trusted	87 (51.8%)	76 (45.3%)	5 (3.0%)	168 (101%) ^a
9. Set long term goals	11 (6.6%)	154 (91.7%)	3 (1.8%)	168 (101%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

criminals and seek immediate gratification rather than setting long term goals. Also, many offenders tend to return to their criminal ways. Therefore, officers may be reluctant to put too much trust in them in order not to be disappointed. Experience has taught officers not to open up to offenders, but to let offenders earn their trust and respect step by step.

As shown in Table 3, a high of 79.8 percent of the respondents believed offenders are not too lazy to work. Only 13.1 percent of the sample thought that offenders were stupid, whereas 83.3 percent disagreed. The data implies that probation officers did not agree with the general stereotype of criminals who commit crime because they do not want

TABLE 3: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward
Offenders, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
3. Too lazy to work	32 (19.1%)	134 (79.8%)	2 (1.2%)	168 (101%) ^a
6. Offenders are stupid	22 (13.1%)	140 (83.3%)	6 (3.6%)	168 (100%)

a. Some error due to rounding

to work. The indication is that officers felt offenders want to work but lack opportunity, education and proper training to become employed or maintain employment. Few of the sample thought that offenders were stupid. Again, the implication is that officers felt that offenders know between right and wrong but often chose the wrong way because of a lack of proper socialization and education rather than because they are stupid. This researcher's experience as a probation officer suggests that many offenders do not live up to their potential, resulting in unemployment, underemployment or poverty.

Table 4 shows that when asked if they thought that offenders were better or worse than other people, the officers were evenly divided (47.1%

agreed, 48.8% disagreed, with 4.2% undecided). It is felt that this question may have been too vague to the respondent and no other implications were derived. Another virtual split in the data was obtained by the response to the statement, "Only few offenders are really bad," with 47.1 percent of the sample in agreement, 42.8 percent in disagreement and 10 percent were undecided. This response was significant when related to the age of the respondent and will be discussed later. Also, when asked if they believed offenders were basically dishonest, the officers were closely divided (40.5% agreed, 52.9% disagreed and 6.5% were undecided).

Finally, to the statement, "Offenders only understand harsh discipline", most officers (73.2%) disagreed. This did not support the researcher's expectations that more officers would believe in strict punishment, demonstrating their law-enforcement orientation. Only 21.5 percent of the sample agreed with harsh discipline, suggesting that the probation officers in this study are more treatment-oriented than anticipated. Table 4 was constructed for a better overview of the above data.

TABLE 4: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward
Offenders, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
2. In favor of harsh discipline	36 (21.5%)	123 (73.2%)	9 (5.4%)	168 (101%) ^a
7. Offenders are basically dishonest	68 (40.5%)	89 (52.9%)	11 (6.5%)	168 (99.9%) ^a
10. Offenders are not better or worse than other people	79 (47.1%)	82 (48.8%)	7 (4.2%)	168 (101%) ^a
11. Only few are really bad	79 (47.1%)	72 (42.8%)	17 (10%)	168 (99.9%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

When all responses in this section of the questionnaire were tested against the demographic variables, only age showed a level of significance when related to two of the statements. The officer's age was significant at the .005 level when tested against the items, "Only a few offenders are really bad" and, "Most offenders never change". It was discovered that the older an officer the higher the percentage of agreement with the statements that offenders are capable of change and that few are

really bad. This held especially true for officers in the age group of 41 and older.

Surprisingly, these findings did not support the researcher's expectation that younger officers would have a more positive outlook towards offenders and older officers would be more negative in their views about offenders. The opposite was revealed by the data. Younger officers were more likely to agree that offenders never change and that they are basically bad people. One explanation for these findings may be that officers in their 40's grew up and were educated during the 1960's, a period during which many young students held liberal views. Students were involved in fighting for individual rights, civil rights, social change and equity in the system. The younger officers, on the other hand, grew up during the 1970's, and were often labeled the "Me Generation". During this period young people were more concerned with the quality of their individual life-style rather than the problems in society. Also during the 1970's, public attitudes were once again leaning toward "getting tough on crime." Thus, contrary to the usual wisdom that youth breeds optimism and liberalism while age brings

cynicism and conservatism, these officers were more likely to be positive toward offenders if they were over 40 years of age.

One additional item in part 4 of the questionnaire relating to this section was, "Since becoming a probation officer my attitude toward offenders in general has become more: a. positive or b. negative." As Table 5 indicates, 36.1 percent stated that their attitudes had become more positive, but 62.7 percent stated their attitudes had become

TABLE 5: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward Offenders, North Florida, 1987

Item #	<u>More Positive</u>	<u>More Negative</u>	<u>Total</u>
9. Since becoming a probation officer my attitude has become:	62 (36.9%)	106 (63.1%)	168 (100%)

more negative. This response would suggest that since interacting with offenders on a daily basis and coming to view them as people with problems and needs much like any one else (rather than only reading about their criminal activities in the media), some officers have become less critical in their views of offenders. On the other hand, the researcher

speculates that those officers who responded that they see offenders more negatively since becoming probation officers perhaps look at the offense the offender committed first and the offender as an individual only second. Also, some probation officers may tend to view an offender in a negative way in order not to be disappointed if the offender continues to commit crimes.

It would have been interesting to see how many respondents would have indicated that their attitude toward offenders had not changed since becoming probation officers. However, this option was not included in the questionnaire. This was an oversight by the researcher and respondents were forced to make a decision between the two available options.

In summary, the results of the statements relating to the attitudes of probation officers toward offenders only partially supported this researcher's expectations. As anticipated, most officers have an overall positive attitude toward offenders. However, many questions showed an almost even split between the positive and negative answers. Also, it was revealed that the officer's age was directly related to his/her views of the offenders.

Contrary to the researcher's expectations, younger officers expressed a more conservative attitude toward offenders where older officers showed a more compassionate attitude toward offenders.

Probation Officers' Attitudes

Toward the Causes of Crime

The eleven questions in this part of the questionnaire inquired about probation officer's beliefs about the causes of crime.

The findings suggested that the vast majority of the sample (97.1%) believed that crime is caused by a combination of factors and that crime cannot be explained by any one theory. An almost equally large percentage (88.7%) of the sample believed that offenders freely choose to commit crime (Table 6). This appears to be a conflict. However, it may translate to the officers' beliefs that free will theory is contained in a combination of factors. It should be noted that less than half (43.4%) of the sample received their college degree in criminology, which could account for their unfamiliarity with criminological theory. Finally, as noted previously, the majority of probation officers in this sample

TABLE 6: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward
the Causes of Crime, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
5. Favor of free will theory	149 (88.7%)	12 (7.1%)	7 (4.2%)	168 (100%)
8. Favor of a combination of factors	163 (97.1%)	4 (2.4%)	1 (0.6%)	168 (101%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

stated that they believed that offenders are capable of change. This is seen by this researcher as a direct link to free will theory, indicating that offenders are able to choose their behavior by making rational decisions.

In contrast to the free will theory, Table 7 shows that almost all officers surveyed (95.3%) decisively rejected the idea that offenders have no control over their behavior. The officers also strongly disagreed (89.9%) that any one is born criminal. These results were anticipated by the researcher because if officers felt offenders were driven by innate forces, there would be no point in trying to direct them toward positive change and probation officers would be wasting their time and effort.

TABLE 7: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward the Causes of Crime, North Florida 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
12. Offenders are born criminal	10 (6.0%)	151 (89.9%)	7 (4.2%)	168 (101%) ^a
14. Offenders have no control over behavior	7 (4.1%)	160 (95.3%)	1 (0.6%)	168 (100%)

a. Some error due to rounding

Another reason for the strong rejection of biological theory could be that, as the data showed, at least half of the sample population viewed criminals not much better or worse than non-criminals. Therefore, a theory suggesting biological and psychic degeneracy of offenders could not be accepted. Interestingly, a small percentage of the sample (5.1%) did agree with biological causes of crime. It was speculated that these respondents may have been generated from the psychology majors represented in this sample by 15.1 percent. Officers with a background in psychology might tend to look for the causes of crime within the individual's defects more than would officers holding other

college majors. However, crosstabulation did not confirm this speculation.

On the other side, respondents with a college major in sociology, representing 16.9 percent of the respondents in this study, might tend to search for the causes of crime in the social and economical theories of crime. Support for social theories was less than expected by the researcher, with only 39.1 percent of the sample blaming poor economics and 42.8 percent blaming environmental factors for criminality. Only 30.1 percent of the officers agreed that an offender's feelings of alienation from the rest of society resulted in criminal behavior (Table 8).

Apparently probation officers look primarily at the person rather than the environment when searching for the causes of crime. One reason for this could be that officers have no control over the offender's surroundings, nor can they do much about bad economical conditions. But they can change an offender's methods of dealing with negative outside influences.

TABLE 8: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward the Causes of Crime, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
6. Criminal behavior re- lates to poor economics	65 (38.7%)	91 (54.2%)	12 (7.1%)	168 (100%)
7. Criminal behavior re- lates to poor environment	70 (41.7%)	82 (48.8%)	16 (9.5%)	168 (100%)
11. Criminal behavior re- lates to alienation from society	50 (29.3%)	95 (56.6%)	23 (13.7%)	168 (99.9%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

In summary, as expected the data demonstrated that the probation officers surveyed were in high agreement about the causes of crime. The majority of the sample rejected biological theory in favor of free will theory with some support given to social theory. Almost all respondents felt that crime is the result of a combination of factors and cannot be explained by any one theory. This section of the questionnaire generated the highest number of undecided responses. As stated previously, it is

felt that some of the respondents were not familiar with criminological theory because they have degrees in fields other than criminology.

Probation Officers' Attitudes

Towards Rehabilitation and Treatment

A third section of the questionnaire, with 15 questions, was designed to examine probation officers' feelings towards rehabilitation and treatment of offenders.

It was discovered that even though 51.2 percent of the officers tested believed that most offenders will become recidivists, 71.4 percent believed that rehabilitation is possible. In fact, the item, "I never met a rehabilitated offender," was disagreed with by 87.5 percent of the respondents (Table 9).

Even though half of the probation officers believed that most offenders will become recidivists, a large majority of the officers believed in the possibility of rehabilitation. It is suggested that probation officers are not discouraged by the high high rate of recidivism primarily because it would be

TABLE 9: Probation Officers' Attitudes Towards
Rehabilitation and Treatment, North
Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
1. Rehabilitation is not possible	40 (23.8%)	120 (71.4%)	8 (4.8%)	168 (100%)
2. Most offenders will become recidivists	86 (51.2%)	69 (41.1%)	13 (7.7%)	168 (100%)
3. I never met a rehabilitated offender	15 (8.9%)	147 (87.5%)	6 (3.6%)	168 (100%)

unrealistic to believe that all offenders could be treated. This researcher's experience as a probation officer, suggests that probation officers often believe that many offenders should have gone to prison rather than being placed on probation in the first place. However, officers have no control over decisions made by the court system. Probation officers tend to believe that if they had more input in court decisions, recidivism would be substantially lower. Also, many probation officers have high caseloads, which tends to result in them giving their attention only to the offenders they feel are worth their rehabilitative efforts and who are willing to

cooperate. As clearly indicated by the data, probation officers believe that rehabilitation is possible even if it is not frequent.

As shown in Table 10, 32.6 percent of the group indicated that they thought the treatment programs available are ineffective, while 81.5 percent of the sample felt resources should be increased and 69.1 percent were willing to spend more money for the increase of resources.

TABLE 10: Probation Officers' Attitudes Towards
Rehabilitation and Treatment, North
Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
8. In favor to increase community resources	137 (81.5%)	24 (14.3%)	7 (4.2%)	168 (100%)
12. Treatment programs are ineffective	54 (32.6%)	94 (55.9%)	20 (11.9%)	168 (104%) ^a
13. More money for treatment	116 (69.1%)	36 (21.5%)	16 (9.5%)	168 (100%)

a. Some error due to rounding

Community resources can be one of the most important aspects in the treatment of offenders. Presently, however, this researcher believes that probation officers in Florida do not have access to sufficient resources in order to do their jobs effectively. Community programs for offenders are either not available, overcrowded or too expensive. The data clearly showed that the majority of the respondents are in favor of increasing resources. However, society sees crime on the rise, reads about the failures rather than the successes of corrections in the media and is, therefore, not willing to fund any additional community programs for offenders. It appears to the researcher that the public increasingly sees the solution to the crime problem to be in warehousing offenders in newly built prisons.

The data indicates that 78 percent of the respondents believe that more prisons should be built, but when asked if they thought prisons rehabilitate offenders 71.4 percent disagreed (Table 11). Also, as Table 11 shows, when asked if more offenders should be supervised in the community only 36.4 percent of the officers agreed.

TABLE 11: Probation Officers' Attitudes Towards
Rehabilitation and Treatment, North
Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
5. Prisons do not rehabilitate	120 (71.4%)	36 (21.5%)	12 (7.1%)	168 (100%)
6. In favor of more community supervision	61 (36.4%)	96 (57.2%)	11 (6.5%)	168 (101%) ^a
11. In favor of more prisons	131 (78%)	27 (16.1%)	10 (6.0%)	168 (101%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

The researcher expected a much larger number of officers to support increased community supervision. With the development of the concept of Community Control, some offenders who otherwise would be in prison are now supervised in the community. It was anticipated that more officers would agree with programs that enable offenders to remain in the community and become productive rather than being a burden to society. However, it appears that the respondents did not look at the overall picture but were only concerned with their own high caseloads and limited resources. If probation officers were given reduced caseloads, had effective community programs

and had more input in the type of offender released on supervision, this researcher believes that more officers would support community supervision. When sentencing practices were addressed, an overwhelming 93.9 percent of the sample felt that prison sentences are not too harsh. A total of 59.0 percent stated that the system coddles offenders (Table 12). Because of prison overcrowding in Florida, many offenders only serve a small portion of their sentences and the probation officers in this study clearly expressed their dissatisfaction with this

TABLE 12: Probation Officers' Attitudes Towards
Rehabilitation and Treatment, North
Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
9. Prison sentences are too harsh	8 (3.8%)	156 (93.9%)	4 (2.4%)	168 (101%) ^a
14. System coddles offenders	99 (59%)	59 (35.1%)	10 (6.0%)	168 (101%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

practice. Also, as the researcher previously speculated, many probation officers felt that a large number of offenders placed under supervision by the court system should have gone to prison because rehabilitative efforts are wasted on them. As the data showed, probation officers believed in the rehabilitation of offenders, but they did not believe in the rehabilitation of all offenders.

As illustrated by Table 13, most probation officers in this study (80.8%) agreed that the system places more emphasis on the rights of offenders and not enough on the rights of the victim. Probation

TABLE 13: Probation Officers' Attitudes Towards
Rehabilitation and Treatment, North
Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
15. Emphasis on offenders' rights, not enough on victims' rights	136 (80.8%)	32 (19.1%)	0	168 (99.9%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

officers are often behind the scenes of criminal procedures. They meet the victims, hear their testimony and see the emotional stress related to

being a crime victim. They also hear deals being made for the offender by defense attorneys and see criminals going free because of some technicality. There is no direct accountability on the part of the offender for the victim. As a probation officer, this researcher speculated that many probation officers felt that offenders are only out to get the lowest sentence possible with no consideration for the victim or society.

When examining how probation officers feel about the death penalty, it was found that 76.3 percent of the officers agreed with this practice, 12 percent disagreed and 11.9 percent were undecided. The percentage of officers choosing the undecided column when responding to this question was higher than most other questions in the questionnaire (Table 14).

TABLE 14: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward the Death Penalty, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
10. I believe in the death penalty	128 (76.3%)	20 (11.9%)	20 (22.9%)	168 (101%) ^a

a. Some error due to rounding

When the death penalty question was related to the demographic variables, only the variable of race was significant at the .001 value level. Among the black officers in this sample, 32.5 percent agreed with the death penalty, 32.3 percent disagreed, and there was an undecided response of 35.2 percent. By contrast, white probation officers agreed with the death penalty by an overwhelming 95.9 percent. Only 2.1 percent of white officers disagreed and the undecided column showed 2 percent (Table 15). The data clearly indicated that white probation officers were unquestionably in favor of the death penalty, while black officers were evenly divided three ways

TABLE 15: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward the Death Penalty By Race, North Florida, 1987

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
10. I believe in the death penalty				
<u>White</u>	117 (85.3%)	11 (8.2%)	9 (6.7%)	137 (81.3%) ^a
<u>Black</u>	9 (5.4%)	9 (5.4%)	10 (6.2%)	28 (16.9%) ^a
<u>Other</u>	3 (1.8%)	0	0	3 (1.8%)

a. Some error due to rounding

on this issue. Only one third of the black officers agreed with the death penalty; they may feel that many black offenders commit criminal acts against other blacks and therefore deserve the ultimate punishment. Another third of the black respondents were undecided when asked their feelings about the death penalty. These officers may look at each specific case before making a commitment to ways of punishment. The final third of the black officers were against the death penalty. It was expected that more black officers would have fallen into this group, since blacks and many whites have historically felt that the criminal justice system has been unfair to the poor and to black offenders. The use of the death penalty has been cited as a prime example of discrimination toward black offenders in the criminal justice system. For example, there has never been a white man executed in Florida for killing a black man but black men have been executed for killing white men. One explanation for some blacks to endorse the death penalty may be black officers who work within the system may perceive the death penalty being applied in a more equitable manner. This issue certainly describes further research.

Surprisingly, the variable of sex did not have any bearing on the outcome of the death penalty item. It was expected that women would be more inclined to spare the life of an offender than men would be. However, the findings did not support this expectation as the answers of both males and females were almost identical.

Probation Officers' Attitudes

Toward Their Jobs

When the probation officers in this sample were questioned about their feelings concerning their job, 92.3 percent of the respondents agreed that they liked their job and only 4.8 percent disagreed, with 3 percent undecided. However, when asked if they were dissatisfied with their job, 18.8 percent agreed with a disagreement of 77.5 percent and again a 3.8 percent of undecided responses (Table 16). Some officers clearly agreed that they liked their job, while at the same time they also agreed that they were dissatisfied with their job. A possible explanation for this contradiction is that officers may like the task of working with the individual

TABLE 16: Probation Officers' Attitudes Toward Job
North Florida, 1987

<u>Item#</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Total</u>
1. I like my job	155 (92.3%)	8 (4.8%)	5 (3.0%)	168 (101%)a
2. I am dis- satisfied with my job	32 (18.8%)	130 (77.5%)	6 (3.8%)	168 (101%)a
3. I would like a job outside the field of corrections	34 (20.3%)	110 (65.4%)	24 (14.3%)	168 (100%)

a. Some error due to rounding

offender, on the one hand, but dislike dealing with the administrative part of their jobs on the other. Probation officers have a tremendous amount of paper work to be completed in a timely manner, which often takes away from the time needed to adequately supervise offenders. The researcher suspects that some officers feel that the supervisory staff is only concerned with administrative duties and not enough with accomplishments made in the treatment of the individual offender. Also, some officers think promotional procedures are unfair or promotional opportunities are lacking. These points could

account for officers being dissatisfied with a job they otherwise like.

The majority of probation officers surveyed (65.4%) would not leave their employment for a different job outside the field of corrections, whereas 20.3 percent indicated they would seek other opportunities. The undecided response for this question was quite high (14.3%). It is believed by the researcher that some officers tend to equate job satisfaction with economic gain. Since many probation officers think that they are overworked and underpaid, it is highly possible that they would change careers if more money was involved.

In summary, the data suggests that almost all of the probation officers in this study liked their jobs and most would not consider employment outside the field of corrections. In contrast, some of the respondents would leave their employment because they were not satisfied with their present situation even though they basically liked their jobs as probation officers. It should be noted that this study did not find any relationship between the officers' job satisfaction and their attitudes towards crime, the criminal offender and treatment.

Probation Officers' Attitudes Towards Crime
and the Offender Compared to the
Attitudes of Other Criminal Justice
Employees and the Public

The results of this study have clearly shown that probation officers generally have positive attitudes toward the criminal offenders they supervise and believe in the basic goodness of mankind. In contrast, one prior study involving the attitudes of police officers toward offenders concluded that police viewed criminals in a negative way (McCormick et al, 1985). In the more extensive research relating to the attitudes of prison officers toward offenders, some of the findings were similar to the findings in this study. For example, in the Alabama study (State of Alabama, Board of Corrections, 1979) it was concluded that at least half of the sample believed that crime is not committed because of poverty, broken homes or biological reasons, but rather because of the offender's free choice. These findings are consistent with the results of this study. However, in contrast to the probation officers in this research, the Alabama

correctional officers felt that strictness was more important in helping inmates than understanding. Again, consistent with the results of this research, in the Illinois study (Jacobs, 1978) prison officers decisively rejected the theory that people are born criminal and adopted a multicausal theory of criminality.

In addition, prison officers surveyed in other studies agreed with the probation officers in this study that the main reason for putting offenders in prison is not punishment, but that rehabilitation programs are equally important. Also, the Illinois prison guards were found to be less disciplinarian in attitude than the Alabama prison officers and were much more in agreement with the probation officers in this study in terms of dealing with offenders.

The data presented in this study revealed that the attitudes of probation officers towards crime and the criminal offender are aligned with the recent trend of society to "get tough on crime" through harsher penalties and less leniency. Probation officers agree with the general public that more prisons are needed and that offenders should receive longer sentences. The support for the death penalty

is almost as high among probation officers as it is among the general public. At the same time, most probation officers surveyed demonstrated liberal views when questioned about the offenders they supervise, in that most felt that offenders were worth their rehabilitative efforts. They maintained a position of commitment toward treatment through increased community resources.

The public believes criminals should receive harsher punishment and longer prison sentences as strategies for reducing crime. As suspected by the researcher, many probation officers felt punishment may be more appropriate in cases that would otherwise be plea bargained into a useless rehabilitative effort. Whatever the reason for the present trend toward stricter punishment may be, probation officers are expected to reflect public attitudes because they are public servants and the needs of society have to be the first consideration in crime issues.

In summary, correctional officers and probation officers appeared to be in agreement as to their attitudes about the causes of crime, criminal offenders and their treatment. Both groups rejected the biological theories of crime in favor of free

will theories and multicausal theories of criminality. Correctional officers tended to be more in agreement with strict discipline when dealing with offenders than probation officers. However, consistent with most probation officers, many correctional employees were in favor of treatment programs for offenders. On the other hand, police officers were found to view offenders in a negative way.

Implications of This Study

The data presented in this study revealed that the probation officers surveyed adhered to a multi-causal theory of crime, had a positive attitude toward offenders and believed in rehabilitation by increasing community resources. Most of the participants liked their work and would not want to be employed outside the field of corrections. However, many of the responses relating to the officers' attitudes toward offenders were almost evenly split. This would support previous research identifying different styles or orientations among probation officers. The law enforcement-oriented

officer and the social worker-oriented officer appeared to be evenly represented in this data.

Surprisingly, the older officers demonstrated more liberal views than the younger officers. One must wonder if these young officers are attracted by the present transition in the field of probation. The functions of the probation officer are becoming more detached from the offender, as evidenced by the introduction of Community Control. As indicated in the Probation and Parole Services Manual of Procedures (1983), Community Control represents a movement toward a more punishment oriented system. This is demonstrated by the use of electronic monitoring and other advanced technology. Although, the program is not a shift toward punishment only it does emphasize harsher discipline and stricter control of offenders.

It appears, from the findings of this study that most officers regard counseling and rehabilitation as an important aspect of probation. With this idealistic purpose reduced, the probation officer may lose his/her sense of dedication in the rehabilitation of offenders. Officers may become "watch dogs", and focus their energy on monitoring

offenders movements rather than providing treatment alternatives. An unforeseen consequence might be that with the counseling mode minimized, the field of probation will have difficulty attracting those interested in entering a helping profession.

The results of this study suggests that in order to continue our rehabilitative efforts we need to concentrate on screening offenders more effectively to determine whether they are suitable for treatment. For example, offenders who have a chance to become crime-free need to be identified by a better system and placed under community supervision. In contrast, offenders who appear dangerous to society need to be sentenced to longer prison terms without early release or any type of community supervision. More resources and better treatment tools have to be developed to aid probation officers in the rehabilitation of those offenders who deserve a chance.

Conclusion and
The Need For Future Research

Crime is a major problem in our nation today. Concern over the steadily rising crime rate is expressed by the majority of Americans. Probation officers are in a unique position to understand the complexities of the crime problem, in that they interact with criminal offenders on a daily basis. The findings of this research reflected a high degree of consistency among probation officers' attitudes towards the causes of crime, the criminal offender and treatment programs. The only significant differences were found when some items were related to the age and the race of probation officers. The research findings also reflected that probation officers were in basic agreement with other criminal justice employees and the general public on most of the important crime issues.

This study is the first step toward building a knowledge base about probation officers and their views, and is meant to encourage further research in this field. For example, it would be of great interest to repeat this study on a statewide scale.

One change this researcher recommends in a future similar study is to examine probation officers' attitudes towards violent and non-violent offenders. It is felt that the outcome of this research might have been different if the researcher had sought to make this separation. Also, of interest would be to determine how the use of high technology such as computers and more sophisticated communication networks will change the attitudes of probation officers toward their job in the future. As indicated above, this research is the first attempt to learn more about probation officers' feelings toward crime issues and it is hoped that it will generate similar studies in the future. There is no reason why probation officers should not attract the same kind of scholarly attention that has been directed toward other professions.

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APPENDIX I
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was designed to gather information about the attitudes of Probation Officers towards the causes of crime, the criminal offender and the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders. The researcher is a fellow Probation Officer engaged in graduate studies in Criminal Justice. The names of the respondents are not included to assure anonymity in this project.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS: You may use either a pen or pencil to complete the questionnaire. Answer each question below by simply marking an X in the appropriate box. Mark only one answer per question, and mark boldly and clearly. Please answer every item.

Beside each of the statements listed below, please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) strongly disagree (SD) or are truly undecided (U).

PART I:

In this first section, we are interested in learning how you feel about criminal offenders with whom you deal.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) Most offenders never change.	()	()	()	()	()
2) Offenders only understand strict and harsh discipline.	()	()	()	()	()
3) Most offenders are too lazy to get a job.	()	()	()	()	()
4) In general, offenders can't be trusted.	()	()	()	()	()
5) Most offenders deserve to be helped.	()	()	()	()	()
6) Most offenders are stupid.	()	()	()	()	()
7) In general, offenders are basically dishonest people.	()	()	()	()	()

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
8) Most offenders want to better themselves.	()	()	()	()	()
9) Most offenders set long range goals for themselves.	()	()	()	()	()
10) Offenders are not better or worse than other people.	()	()	()	()	()
11) Only a few offenders are really bad.	()	()	()	()	()

PART II:

In this section, we would like to know how you feel about the causes of criminal behavior.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) Offenders are born criminal.	()	() ()	()	()	
2) Criminal behavior is the result of a person's biological make-up.	()	() ()	()	()	
3) Offenders have no control over their behavior.	()	() ()	()	()	
4) Offenders have sufficient free will to choose between good and evil.	()	() ()	()	()	
5) In general, offenders freely choose to commit crime.	()	() ()	()	()	
6) In general, criminal behavior is the result of poor economic conditions.	()	() ()	()	()	

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
7) The main reason for crime is an offender's environment.	()	()	()	()	()
8) Criminal behavior is the result of a combination of factors.	()	()	()	()	()
9) Criminal behavior can not be explained by any one single theory.	()	()	()	()	()
10) Most offenders are victims of unfortunate circumstances.	()	()	()	()	()
11) In general, feelings of alienation from society causes a person to turn to criminal behavior.	()	()	()	()	()

PART III:

In this section, we would like to know about your feelings on rehabilitation and treatment of offenders.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) In general, rehabilitation of criminal offenders is not possible.	()	()	()	()	()
2) Most offenders will become recidivists.	()	()	()	()	()
3) I never met a rehabilitated offender.	()	()	()	()	()
4) Trying to rehabilitate most offenders is a waste of time and money.	()	()	()	()	()
5) Prisons do not rehabilitate offenders.	()	()	()	()	()

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
6) More offenders should be supervised in the community rather than sent to prison.	()	()	()	()	()
7) It is more difficult to supervise offenders who have been in Prison.	()	()	()	()	()
8) Community based resources for offenders should be increased.	()	()	()	()	()
9) In general, prison sentences are too harsh.	()	()	()	()	()
10) I believe in the death penalty.	()	()	()	()	()
11) We need to build more prisons.	()	()	()	()	()
12) Treatment programs for offenders are ineffective.	()	()	()	()	()
13) More money should be spent on treatment programs for offenders.	()	()	()	()	()
14) The system coddles offenders.	()	()	()	()	()
15) The system places too much emphasis on the rights of offenders and not enough on the rights of the victims.	()	()	()	()	()

PART IV:

Finally, we would like to know a little about you as a respondent so we can see how different types of people feel about the issues we have been examining.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) I like my job.	()	()	()	()	()

- | | <u>SA</u>
1 | <u>A</u>
2 | <u>D</u>
3 | <u>SD</u>
4 | <u>U</u>
5 |
|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| 2) I am dissatisfied with my job. | () | () | () | () | () |
| 3) I would prefer a different job outside of the field of Corrections. | () | () | () | () | () |
| 4) I have been a Probation Officer for | | | | | |
| less than 1 year | () | | | | |
| 1 to 3 years | () | | | | |
| 4 to 6 years | () | | | | |
| 7 to 10 years | () | | | | |
| 10 years or more | () | | | | |
| 5) My age is | | | | | |
| 21 to 30 years | () | | | | |
| 31 to 40 years | () | | | | |
| over 40 years | () | | | | |
| 6) My race is | | | | | |
| Black | () | | | | |
| White | () | | | | |
| Other | () | | | | |
| 7) My sex is | | | | | |
| Male | () | | | | |
| Female | () | | | | |
| 8) My College Major was | | | | | |
| Criminology | () | | | | |
| Psychology | () | | | | |
| Sociology | () | | | | |
| Other | () | | | | |
| 9) Since becoming a Probation Officer my attitude toward offenders in general has become more | | | | | |
| Positive | () | | | | |
| Negative | () | | | | |

APPENDIX II
QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDING THE DATA

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was designed to gather information about the attitudes of Probation Officers towards the causes of crime, the criminal offender and the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders. The researcher is a fellow Probation Officer engaged in graduate studies in Criminal Justice. The names of the respondents are not included to assure anonymity in this project.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS: You may use either a pen or pencil to complete the questionnaire. Answer each question below by simply marking an X in the appropriate box. Mark only one answer per question, and mark boldly and clearly. Please answer every item.

Beside each of the statements listed below, please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) strongly disagree (SD) or are truly undecided (U).

PART I:

In this first section, we are interested in learning how you feel about criminal offenders with whom you deal.

	<u>SA</u> 1	<u>A</u> 2	<u>D</u> 3	<u>SD</u> 4	<u>U</u> 5
1) Most offenders never change.	8	55	88	12	5
2) Offenders only understand strict and harsh discipline.	5	31	100	23	9
3) Most offenders are too lazy to get a job.	3	29	111	23	2
4) In general, offenders can't be trusted.	14	73	68	8	5
5) Most offenders deserve to be helped.	18	102	36	3	9
6) Most offenders are stupid.	3	19	82	58	6
7) In general, offenders are basically dishonest people.	8	60	77	12	11

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
8) Most offenders want to better themselves.	5	82	59	8	14
9) Most offenders set long range goals for themselves.	1	10	82	72	3
10) Offenders are not better or worse than other people.	7	72	66	16	7
11) Only a few offenders are really bad.	10	69	53	19	17

PART II:

In this section, we would like to know how you feel about the causes of criminal behavior.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) Offenders are born criminal.	1	9	66	85	7
2) Criminal behavior is the result of a person's biological make-up.	2	18	67	64	17
3) Offenders have no control over their behavior.	1	6	71	89	1
4) Offenders have sufficient free will to choose between good and evil.	54	101	8	3	2
5) In general, offenders freely choose to commit crime.	46	103	11	1	7
6) In general, criminal behavior is the result of poor economic conditions.	3	62	73	18	12

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
7) The main reason for crime is an offender's environment.	7	63	65	17	16
8) Criminal behavior is the result of a combination of factors.	94	69	2	2	1
9) Criminal behavior can not be explained by any one single theory.	95	66	3	3	1
10) Most offenders are victims of unfortunate circumstances.	2	33	90	38	5
11) In general, feelings of alienation from society causes a person to turn to criminal behavior.	3	47	68	27	23

PART III:

In this section, we would like to know about your feelings on rehabilitation and treatment of offenders.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) In general, rehabilitation of criminal offenders is not possible.	8	32	97	23	8
2) Most offenders will become recidivists.	6	80	63	6	13
3) I never met a rehabilitated offender.	3	12	86	61	6
4) Trying to rehabilitate most offenders is a waste of time and money.	7	35	80	38	8
5) Prisons do not rehabilitate offenders.	44	76	29	7	12

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
6) More offenders should be supervised in the community rather than sent to prison.	10	51	67	29	11
7) It is more difficult to supervise offenders who have been in Prison.	6	28	93	31	10
8) Community based resources for offenders should be increased.	41	96	22	2	7
9) In general, prison sentences are too harsh.	3	5	99	57	4
10) I believe in the death penalty.	87	41	7	13	20
11) We need to build more prisons.	59	72	21	6	10
12) Treatment programs for offenders are ineffective.	10	44	83	11	20
13) More money should be spent on treatment programs for offenders.	24	92	29	7	16
14) The system coddles offenders.	29	70	55	4	10
15) The system places too much emphasis on the rights of offenders and not enough on the rights of the victims.	75	61	22	10	0

PART IV:

Finally, we would like to know a little about you as a respondent so we can see how different types of people feel about the issues we have been examining.

	$\frac{SA}{1}$	$\frac{A}{2}$	$\frac{D}{3}$	$\frac{SD}{4}$	$\frac{U}{5}$
1) I like my job.	47	108	6	2	5

	<u>SA</u> <u>1</u>	<u>A</u> <u>2</u>	<u>D</u> <u>3</u>	<u>SD</u> <u>4</u>	<u>U</u> <u>5</u>
2) I am dissatisfied with my job.	4	28	83	47	6
3) I would prefer a different job outside of the field of Corrections.	6	28	78	32	24
4) I have been a Probation Officer for					
less than 1 year	13				
1 to 3 years	57				
4 to 6 years	43				
7 to 10 years	25				
10 years or more	30				
5) My age is					
21 to 30 years	57				
31 to 40 years	80				
over 40 years	31				
6) My race is					
Black	28				
White	137				
Other	3				
7) My sex is					
Male	99				
Female	69				
8) My College Major was					
Criminology	73				
Psychology	25				
Sociology	29				
Other	41				
9) Since becoming a Probation Officer my attitude toward offenders in general has become more					
Positive	62				
Negative	106				

VITA

Hannelore Watts

Date of Birth:

Place of Birth:

EXPERIENCE

- 1982 - present **Probation Officer**, Florida Department of Corrections. Provide security and protection to the community through control and supervision of offenders. Conduct investigations as required by the Circuit Courts.
- 1981 - 1982 **Volunteer** at Group Home for delinquent boys, Jacksonville Florida. Helped organize activities for the residents.
- 1970 - 1981 **Data Entry Clerk**, Gulf Life Insurance Company Jacksonville, Florida. Entered data relating to all phases of the Insurance business into a computer.

EDUCATION

B.A., Criminal Justice, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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REFERENCES

References covering all phases of education and experience on request.